DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 331 096 CS 212 814

AUTHOR Dienstfrey, Sherri R.
TITLE Creative Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare in High School.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 18p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Activities; *English Instruction; High Schools; High School Students; *Learning Activities; *Literature Appreciation; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Shakespeare (William)

ABSTRACT

William Shakespeare should be taught in high schools in an entertaining fashion so the high school student will appreciate his genius, keen insights, and talents. A strategy to accomplish this goal starts with simple material and progresses to the more difficult. Shakespeare's personal and historical background are presented in a short lecture, and summarized and reviewed in a game of "Jeopardy." Variations of the "Match Game" encourage students to complete reading assignments of the play they are studying, thus becoming familiar with its basic elements of plot and character. Viewing a live performance of the play is an ideal starting point for students learning to interpret and analyze critically Shakespeare's writing. Dramatization will bring out questions and various views regarding the play. In small groups, students can discuss and answer questions, employing application and analysis. Synthesis and evaluation of information is promoted when small groups are assigned roles to represent, and must respond to issues and provocative questions arising from discussion of the play. The "Meeting of the Minds" game presents this activity in panel discussion form. Interpretive assignments, such as varying the interpretation of mini-scenes from the play by moving its locale, also require synthesis and imagination from students. Two groups of students might each perform the same scene, but with different interpretations--the goal being not a polished performance but one that has been thoroughly considered. (SR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED331096

Creative Approaches to Teaching

Shakespeare in High School

Sherri R. Dienstfrey

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sherri Dienstfrey

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS 212814

Creative Approaches to Teaching

Shakespeare in High School

Sherri R. Dienstfrey

Few would contest that William Shakespeare is one of the most important authors studied in high school. Within the confines of a single work, he is a novelist, poet, and playwright. Yet few students enjoy their first experience with the Bard unless teachers make a special effort with their presentation. Over twenty-five years ago Professor Bertrand Evans wrote Teaching Shakespeare in the High School. He discussed various activities for the English teacher to use while tackling Shakespeare. Among his suggestions were: (1) writing, (2) outside reading, (3) dramatic reading or acting out, (4) memorization, (5) films, (6) recordings, and (7) testing. His suggestions are well organized, helpful, and obvious. Yet, Evans neglects the fact that Shakespeare is entertaining. Shakespeare needs to be taught in an entertaining fashion for the high school student to appreciate his genius and savor his keen insights and talents.

It is up to the teacher to formulate approaches that will motivate the student to comprehend, interpret, and enjoy Shakespeare's works. I would like to provide a strategy to accomplish this goal. My approach starts with simple material and progresses to the more difficult. The students will begin with a basic knowledge and comprehension of Shakespeare and his writings. They will then move onto the more complicated ideas of application and analysis of his works. They will conclude with a synthesis of the material that leads to

original and creative thinking, which is the most difficult concept for students to comprehend. I will use The Taming of the Shrew to illustrate my points, although you may substitute any Shakespeare play within the framework of the exercises. I will present an integrated program of lectures and exercises that asks students to read and memorize important aspects regarding Shakespeare and his works. This allows students to create and examine interpretations of the Elizabethan writer from several points of view. The lessons teach and entertain, an appropriate approach to Shakespeare since that was his goal as a playwright.

Begin with simple concepts. Before a student can interpret Shakespeare, he or she must read and remember the play, as well as understand the playwright's background. After you assign The Taming of the Shrew introduce Shakespeare via a short lecture. Highlight his career, bring in his contemporaries, explore the various theories concerning his early life, and describe the creative and financial pressures behind his writing, and the audience for whom he wrote. This provides a personal and historic context within which a student can understand Shakespeare's writings. Any Signet Classic or Pelican edition of Shakespeare's plays will include a brief history of the author and his times.

You may summarize and review the materials presented in the lecture by a game of "Jeopardy." Divide your class into three or four teams. Your role is to play the emcee by presenting, in the form of an answer, the facts you have just covered in your lecture (see Figure 1). Have your students create possible questions and answers for this game after your lecture or make them yourself. Call on the students for a response in the form of a question once you hear a knock on the team's desk. Maintain a score and present a suitable

prize for all the members of the winning team. Remember, the goal of this game is to give students a common background. Therefore, repeat all answers given by the student and if they do not know a term, explain it once again. Your students will hear the facts at least twice within one class period.

Figure 1
Examples of Answers and Questions for Shakespearean JEOPARDY[1]

1. The number of sides of an Elizabethan playhouse. (What is EIGHT)
2. This is Shakespeare's birthplace. (What is STRATFORD-ON-AVON)
3. The London playhouse built for performances by the King's Men; many of Shakespeare's plays were first presented there. (What is THE GLOBE)
4. The speech made by an actor as if to himself when alone on the stage; this speech is a device through which the character reveals his thoughts and feelings to the audience. (What is a SOLILOQUY)
5. The Stuart king who reigned from 1603 to 1625; many of the major dramatists of Shakespeare's time wrote their best works during the first ten years of his rule. (Who is JAMES I)
6. Shakespeare's other theatrical occupation besides that of playwright. (What is an ACTOR)
7. The English monarch whose name is used to label the dramas written by Shakespeare and his contemporaries; ruled from 1558 to 1603. (Who is ELIZABETH I)
8. The number of plays attributed to Shakespeare. (What is THIRTY-SIX)

9. The area immediately in front of the platform of the Elizabethan stage; admission to this area cost one penny and there the audience remained standing during the performance. (What is THE PIT)

10. The English dramatist, lyric poet and actor who was a contemporary of Shakespeare; famous for his play Volpone and his lyric Song to Celia, both of which show neoclassical influence. (Who is JONSON)

11. He was the leading Elizabethan actor who appeared in the original productions of the plays written by Shakespeare. (Who is RICHARD BURBAGE)

12. The English dramatist best known for his Spanish Tragedy; exponent of "tragedy of blood." (Who is KYD)

In subsequent days, reinforce the personal and historical lecture regarding Shakespeare through a crossword puzzle. Different puzzles to assist the teacher and student with Shakespeare have been created by The Perfection Form Company of Logan, Iowa. If you have the time or inclination you can make one up using the exact questions found in your Jeopardy Game, thus reinforcing the same facts once again.

Now that Shakespeare's personal and historical background are known, students are ready to delve into his writing. We expect our students to read every assignment. Unfortunately, they do not. A second exercise can encourage students to complete the assigned reading. A variation of the "Match Game" for the entire class entices those students to read or finish the

[1] "Acrostics from Shakespeare," The Perfection Form Company (Logan: Iowa, 1970)

play before the actual discussion begins. On your chalk board write the names of the characters that appear in the play. On cards, write a description of each character (see Figure 2). Each row becomes a team. Begin with the first person of each row and read a description, allow them to match it to the proper name. If the first person in Row A cannot answer, go to the first person in Row B, and continue until no description cards remain. Keep score and present an appropriate award for the winning row. Before you dismiss the class warn your students that tomorrow you will use a variation of this game to make sure everyone has read the play at least once.

Figure 2
Characters and Descriptions for The Taming of the Shrew MATCH GAME

CHRISTOPHER SLY	1. Her father's prize possession and lusted after by numerous men.
BAPTISTA	2. An old fool yearning for a young wife.
LUCENTIO	3. She is put in her "womanly" place at Bianca's wedding by Kate.
VINCENTIO	4. Delights in putting his wife in her "proper" place.
PETRUCHIO	5. Changes her ways due to "taming tactics."
	6. Petruchio's servant and human punching bag.
HORTENSIO	7. Dreams of marriage to Bianca but ends up with a wealthy widow.
GREMIO	8. Sells his daughters to the highest bidders.
TRANIO	9. A drunken tinker who opens the play.
GRUMIO	10. Falls in love with Bianca and disguises himself as a scholar to get closer to her.
KATHARINA	11. Father to Lucentio and declared a "maiden" by Kate.

BIANCA 12. Servant to Lucentio who disguises himself as his master.

WIDOW

As with the previous exercise, this one further encourages students to complete their reading assignment.

The following day begins with a test in a game disguise. Place character names on the board, but instead of reading a description of the character, as in the last exercise, recite a line that the character stated in the play. The lines chosen should not be obscure but should epitomize the character's personality. Use approximately ten lines and ask your students to write down the appropriate character for each quote. This exercise/test is a simple way of letting you know who has or has not read the play (see Figure 3). Approach students who have not read the play and provide assistance and encouragement, if necessary.

Figure 3
Examples of Character Quotes for The Taming of the Shrew
Line Play Quiz

1. "Am I a lord? and have such a lady? Or do I dream?" (CHRISTOPHER SLY)
2. "Your husband, being troubled with a shrew, measures my husband's sorrow by his woe: and now you know my meaning." (WIDOW)
3. "Gentlemen, importune me no farther, for how I firmly am resolves you know; That is not to bestow my youngest daughter, before I have a husband for the elder." (BAPTISTA)

4. "Believe me, sister, of all the men alive I never yet beheld that special face which I could fancy more than any other." (BIANCA)
5. "Tranio, I burn, I pine, I perish, Tranio, if I achieve not this young modest girl." (LUCENTIO)
6. "I am ashamed that women are simple to offer war where they should kneel for peace." (KATHARINA)
7. "But is this true? or is it else your please, like pleasant travellers, to break a jest upon the company you overtake?" (VINCENTIO)
8. "My master is grown quarrelsome: I should knock you first, and then I know after who comes by the worst." (GRUMIO)
9. "Why, there's a wench! Come on, and kiss me, Kate." (PETRUCHIO)
10. "I am content to be Lucentio, because so well I love Lucentio." (TRANIO)
11. "I will be married to a wealthy widow. . . . Kindness in women, not their beauteous looks, shall win my love." (HORTENSIO)
12. "But now, Baptista, to your younger daughter--now is the day we long have looked for. I am your neighbour, and was suitor first." (GREMIO)

Once the "line play quiz" is complete, the students should comprehend the personal and historical context within which Shakespeare wrote, as well as the basic elements of plot and character in The Taming of the Shrew. Familiarization with the historical, character, and plot elements of

Shakespeare's work is only a beginning. Students must now move on to more complicated ideas and be taught to critically interpret and analyze Shakespeare's writing.

Through application and analysis, a student will demonstrate the ability to interpret Shakespeare, question various aspects of Shakespeare's works, and debate pertinent points regarding his writings. An ideal starting point for this process would be the viewing a live performance of the play.

In planning your semester or year's work, you might check if a nearby college, university, or community theatre plans a Shakespeare production. If so, by all means plan your Shakespeare unit around attendance at a performance. A stage production will bring the words and characters to life right before your students' eyes. If a production is not produced in your community exactly when you need it, a few other options can be explored. Videos and films are fine but do not allow for discussion with the players and/or director which can lead to very interesting insights. Try contacting a nearby college theatre department and ask if advanced acting and directing students would stage a few scenes from The Taming of the Shrew for your school. Not only would this benefit your class but many colleges and universities today go out of their way to recruit students. The exposure in your school (be it a single class or a few classes joining together to watch the performance) is an ideal opportunity to advertise their department and institution, as well as a good training experience for their students. Many colleges, in fact, have touring companies, a few of which are Shakespeare oriented. Be sure to plan well in advance. You might be pleasantly surprised at the helpfulness and skills of college students and faculty.

If you have tried the university outlet to no avail, look within your own school. If you have a drama department or club, perhaps they will produce a few scenes for you. Maybe you have students from past classes (if Shrew is taught sophomore year, go to juniors and seniors) that would like to attempt a scene or two. Even a colleague may have aspirations of acting and will do you this favor. Just be sure to plan ahead and give plenty of time for preparation.

Bringing the play to life, even if it is only one scene, stimulates the student's imagination. Actions now go with the words, students associate personalities with the characters' names, and Shakespeare becomes easier to understand, interpret, and analyze. Now it is time to apply the knowledge gained via the dramatization.

Chances are some of your students will question various aspects of the production. They will want to know what certain lines mean, why they were delivered a specific way, how Shakespeare wanted them interpreted, and what his purpose was in writing the play. You have piqued their curiosity and now it is time to analyze various views regarding the play. If they do not inquire about these areas then bring out the questions yourself by playing the devil's advocate. An easy means to this end is small group discussion because it allows for brainstorming, which leads to keener observations and more candid conversation among your students. Through monitored small groups, your student will have the opportunity to discuss and dissect the purpose of the play. Divide your class into groups consisting of four to six students, each group having a leader/secretary who jots down the major points made. Direct the small groups by giving each three to four (of the same) questions to answer within a specific amount of time.

Figure 4
Examples of Small Group Discussion Questions

1. What purpose did Shakespeare have in mind by depicting such a rough-house treatment of love and marriage in The Taming of the Shrew?
2. Who are the victims in The Taming of the Shrew and why did Shakespeare depict them in such a way?
3. The word "father" appears 54 times in The Taming of the Shrew, more than any other Shakespeare comedy. This leads one to believe that Shakespeare was trying to make a point pertaining to the Patriarch. What would that point be?
4. The medium of Language is used in the games played by Petruchio and Kate throughout The Taming of the Shrew. Act II, Scene i; Act IV, Scene iii, and Act IV, Scene v, are just a few examples. Who is the winner and why?
5. Appearances are deceiving through The Taming of the Shrew. The penniless Christopher Sly is made into a lord, Lucentia's clever servant Trania turns into a wealthy suitor to Bianca while the real Lucentio becomes her teacher. Does this lead us to conclude that Kate's final subservient attitude is merely a deception?

Go from one group to the next for brief periods, listening to their discussions and taking provocative positions when necessary. Be sure everyone has a chance to voice an opinion, reinforce valid points, and steer the conversation away from needless banter. Every ten minutes or so, remind your students to summarize and support their ideas, and go on to the next question.

For the last part of your class, open up the discussion, first to the leaders to recapitulate the groups' thoughts and then to everyone in the class. Compare and contrast the ideas given and draw conclusions whenever possible.

Through small group discussion you are encouraging your students to (1) question the words of the Bard; (2) distinguish between the "real" character and superficial appearances; and, (3) debate issues such as love, marriage, and women in subservient roles. Students now employ application and analysis to the play and presentation.

To further the analytic process, take the conclusions drawn from the previous class and open it up to new directions and perspectives. For instance, while answering question #2, the group decides Bianca is the victim in The Taming of the Shrew because Shakespeare has her playing a subordinate role in her "affairs of the heart." This suggests that appearances can be deceiving. Now have the group justify Bianca's unthoughtful answers to Kate's truthful questions regarding love in Act II, scene i; or her unruly behavior in the wedding scene, Act V, scene ii. Present the possibility that it is really Bianca who is the shrew and Kate who is the victim of circumstances. By delving deeper into the analysis, via the small group process, students will now synthesize and evaluate information. The final goal in this three-step process can now be met.

Divide your class into the same groups. Deal one card labeled: (1) 16th Century Actor; (2) 20th Century Actor; (3) 16th Century Teacher; (4) 20th Century teacher; and, (5) Shakespeare, out to each group. You may wish to include even more thought-provoking groups such as women in abusive marriages or marriage counselors. Have groups select a representative to become the role listed on the card. Give the groups a few minutes to review the

questions from yesterday's discussion but in the perspective of the designated card they have been dealt. Have them question whether their conclusions remain the same now that they must play a specific role. Not only will the students have to draw on their ideas from the small group discussion but on your lecture of Shakespeare and his times, as well.

Give ample time for small group discussion and then begin the "Meeting of the Minds" game. You become the Master of Ceremonies and introduce each panel member. Give a few background facts just to refresh everyone's memory as to who they are and what that means. Be sure to guide your students throughout the entire panel. You might remind your 16th century teacher, that even though he is only 25, he has been married nine years and has six children and a submissive wife to support, or interject that our 20th century teacher of 25 has her Master's degree, no husband, no children, and no desire to change her life style.

Explain that this is a panel discussion and will be open to questions from the audience once each member has had an opportunity to respond to the initial question. You determine this question through the earlier discussion groups. For example, if the "appearances are deceiving" question (Figure 3, part 5) created the most controversy and interesting commentaries, it would begin the Meeting of the Minds panel. Open the floor up to questions from the 20th century audience (or divide the class into 16th century and 20th century folk). Be prepared with a few provoking questions just in case your class takes a while to warm up. A few possible questions are: Do you find it degrading to speak, hear and/or teach the idea of being "ashamed that women are so simple?" Why does Petruchio see himself as being superior to Kate merely because he is a man? How could anyone write such a devastatingly

brutal scene as IV, v when Petruchio starves Kate? What is the point of this brutality? By the end of the play have Kate and Petruchio won each other's love? Behind the formal words spoken is there a hidden meaning and mutual affection? By bringing up such questions, you make the play relevant. It does not matter what discrepancies are found or if your students see the play from a negative or positive point of view. They have been made to think. They have been made to understand where Shakespeare was coming from and how we see him today. In other words, Shakespeare has become accessible to the high school student.

Once your students feel comfortable with Shakespeare, it is feasible to move on to even more difficult concepts. Varied performance interpretations create interesting problems for the students to solve. The student will need to synthesize the material and come up with original and imaginative ideas to fulfill the interpretation assignment. Suggest an American Western locale or a futuristic interpretation to clarify your aim. Whatever their choice, you will, once again, be accomplishing goal three.

To illustrate various interpretations assign your students a mini-scene to perform. Divide your class into four or six groups (depending on the number of students) and have two groups perform the same scene. For example, in The Taming of the Shrew you may wish to assign Kate and Petruchio's Act II, Scene One from line 182 to 319, or Kate and Bianca's Act II, Scene One from line 1 to 23. Remind your students that irony, sarcasm, and truthfulness can change the meaning of any given line. In fact, you may wish to tell one group to play the scene truthfully while the other group should search for every ironic interpretation in the lines.

Emphasize that you are not looking for a polished performance but one that has been thoroughly considered. What hints were found in the script that caused the students to deliver the lines in such a manner? Since there are so few stage directions given, how did they devise the movement and gesture? And what message did they want to get across through their interpretations?

Allow enough time for your students to discuss the scene, decipher its purpose, and stage it adequately. Line memorization is not necessary. Have your students present the "identical" scenes back to back without comment. If you are not comfortable having your students create these various scenes, you are more than welcome to contact me and I will send you a video that my Advanced Acting students performed. On this tape you will find a faithful depiction of the scenes listed above, as well as an ironic version of the identical episode. Hence, you will be able to exchange opinions regarding the various interpretations. Once both scenes have been executed, open the class up for discussion. Avoid questions such as, which scene was best? Direct attention to similarities, contrasts, and other possibilities. Note the variety in interpretations and the ambiguity of Shakespeare in many respects. Ask who is correct? Will we ever know? Is ambiguity a virtue or a fault in Shakespeare? The interpretation assignment allows you and your students one last opportunity to revel in Shakespeare's comic genius and appreciate possible shortcomings of the writer. Shakespeare is human!

Learning Shakespeare should be an enjoyable experience. Many students are hesitant to discover this Elizabethan phenomenon because of preconceived notions. Although some apprehension is understandable, it should not negate the desire to study him. Quite the contrary, his mystique can enhance the learning process. By using this strategy of beginning with simple ideas and

gradually progressing to more complex issues, a student will not only gain an appreciation for Shakespeare but for his own ability to decipher and enjoy the work.

Communication and Theatre
Idaho State University
Pocatello, Idaho 83209

WORKS CITED

Evans, Bertrand. Teaching Shakespeare in the High School. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1966.

Granville-Barker, Harley, and Harrison, G.B., eds. A Companion to Shakespeare Studies. London: Cambridge University Press. 1934.

Oliver, H.J., Ed. The Oxford Shakespeare: The Taming of the Shrew. London: Oxford University Press. 1982.

Pitt, Angela. Shakespeare's Women. Totowa, New Jerysey: Barnes and Noble Books. 1981.